
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Anacostia Historic District	(x) Consent
Address:	1644 U Street SE	
Meeting Date:	January 26, 2017	(x) Addition
Case Number:	17-141	
Staff Reviewer:	Tim Dennée	(x) Permit

The applicants, property owners Sheryl and Leonard Bennett, request the Board's review of a permit application to construct a two-story addition with a walk-out basement, to alter a front basement entrance and the front porch, and to replace the windows. The two-story semi-detached brick house was constructed in 1912.

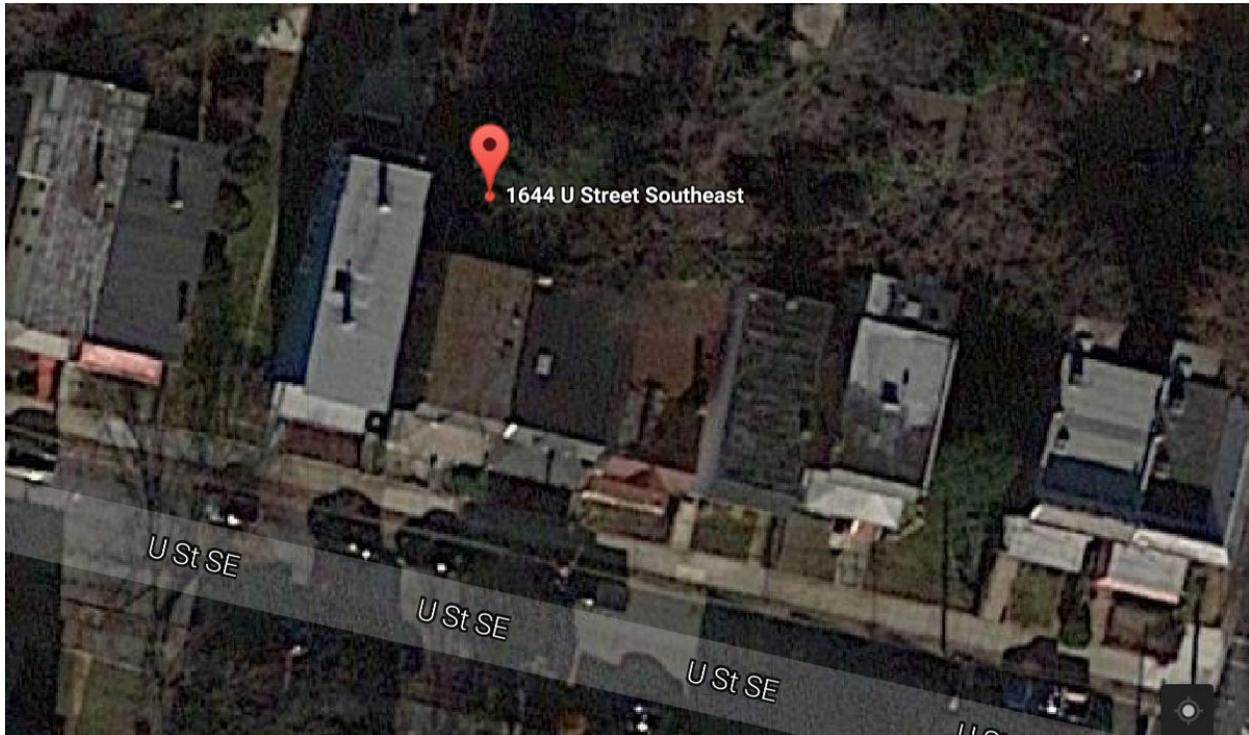
Addition

Most of the historic buildings on the square have not been extended, but a few have. Neither 1644 U nor its attached twin have had additions, but both have rear porches. The rear porch would be removed in order to construct an nineteen-and-a-half-foot-deep addition. The addition would have an approximately five-foot side yard (assuming zoning approval), so that the addition would be a fairly typical ell. As the addition is subordinate to the 34-foot-deep main block (and its front porch)—being lower, narrower and shallower, with a conventional side-shedding roof—its massing seems sufficiently compatible to the character of the subject property. As the lot also contains a garage, the new construction would presumably reach the limit of the site's potential lot occupancy under the zoning regulations.

The second consideration about the addition's size and massing is how it, and the completed building as a whole, would compare to the general pattern of development on the street. As one can see from the aerial photograph on the next page, 1644 U is now one of the shallowest houses, and adding less than 20 feet would put it just beyond its neighbors to the west. Further, the homes are pretty tightly packed on this block, and the features of their rear yards have little impact on the street, unless viewed through the back yards from Fendall Street, at the northeast corner of the historic district.

A sided wing of this size and type is sufficiently compatible with a modest brick home and is generally compatible with a modest and mostly frame historic district. The proposed siding is fiber-cement, which the Board has found generally acceptable as a substitute for wood on new construction and additions in this historic district and others. Pre-1930s siding was generally of narrow exposure, so for consistency and to mitigate the flatness of fiber-cement, the siding should be no wider than six-inch exposure (while being smooth-surfaced, rather than textured).

The house's rear wall would be mostly demolished, but its other walls and its floor and roof framing would remain. The base of the rear addition is proposed to be painted, poured concrete.



Porch

Proposed for replacement are the porch posts and balustrade. Mid-twentieth-century steel supports would be replaced by full-height Tuscan columns, similar to what homes of this type and period would have had originally. A close examination of the porch shows that the central brick pier supporting the porch slab is not below the middle porch support. The replacement column supporting the middle of the porch span almost certainly should be right over that pier, as that was probably the original condition for structural reasons and because the front steps would then be centered between that column and the one on the east corner.

Related to the location of the pier and column is the issue of the location and size of the porch apron, now openwork concrete block, but proposed to be replaced by period-appropriate framed wood lattice. The lattice should sit between, and not over, the piers; the elevation seems to use it to obscure the central pier. The frame for each panel should be specified as of nominal four-inch-wide lumber, which is typical.

The porch balustrade is not quite right yet, in that it should be wood, rather than composite, and that is too open and spindly. On a house of this style and dating to the 1910s, the balusters would be closely spaced and sit on a beveled bottom rail and beneath a proper grip rail. Probably no more than a block, rather than an intermediate post, is necessary to keep the whole from sagging at center span. On historic homes, balustrades usually vary in height between about 28 and 32 inches. Although a taller rail is called for by code, a shorter one would be better proportioned to the space beneath the porch roof and is allowable as a replacement on a historic house. A section detail of the replacement balustrade should appear in the final permit application drawings.

The plans and elevations indicate that the front steps would be replaced and widened. There are no details on this, although the elevations seem to indicate that they would now be wood. The

present concrete steps are likely replacements. The originals may well have been concrete, however, like the slab, as that was a very common material at the time of construction.

Basement entrance

There is presently a basement entrance under the porch, reached by a narrow stair around the open west end of the porch. It is proposed that the areaway be expanded beneath the entire porch, but that it be largely screened by the replacement apron discussed above.

The steps would be replaced by wider ones in front of the porch. This would obviously make passage into the basement easier, especially with large objects. It is an alteration that has been approved numerous times in other historic districts, and here is mitigated somewhat by the restoration of a proper porch apron. There is less call for this type of alteration in Anacostia, as the zoning has historically discourage basement units, and most porches are so near the grade as to make such entrances impractical.

These steps would project a bit onto public space, something that might be approved by the Department of Transportation because they would occur in the fenced area that now contains the concrete patio. While tearing up that patio would be an improvement of the yard, that improvement is mitigated by the excavation and new hardscape of the steps themselves. As it is, our rule of thumb is that new basement steps should not extend much farther toward the street than the main entrance steps. There are two possible alternatives that would be more compatible.

First, understanding that the key is to get needed headroom when passing beneath the outer edge of the porch slab, it would be better if the run of the stairs could somehow be tightened to get more of it under and closer to the porch. This may or may not be feasible. But another alternative is to keep the stairs where they are now—at the west end of the porch—and arrange the porch apron so that it may be lifted or removed in order to pass larger objects under the front of the porch into the areaway beneath.

Windows

The plans call for replacement of the existing one-over-one double-hung wood windows with the same, although presumably now double-glazed. This will be compatible if the window product has decent profiles, fits the original masonry openings properly, and reuses or replicates the original brick molds.

Other items

Two new condenser units will be located alongside the addition.

No new or replacement meters are depicted on the drawings, although if any are added in the future, the basement areaway provides a place to locate and conceal them.

There is a note on the site plan (SP.01) stating that the garage door is to be removed, but there is no further information about the garage or a replacement door.

Recommendation

HPO recommends that the Board recommend that the staff clear the permit as compatible with the character of the historic district, with the conditions that:

- 1. the fiber-cement siding of the addition not exceed six-inch exposure;*
- 2. the center porch column be situated over the center pier;*

3. *the porch balustrade be detailed like a traditional balustrade;*
4. *the porch steps be detailed;*
5. *the porch apron lattice be framed by 1x4s, with the panels set between the piers;*
6. *the applicant explore alternative approaches to the basement steps, so that they not extend so far forward of the porch if feasible; and*
7. *there be no new or replacement meters on the front or in front of the house.*